

INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE REVIEW



Editor: René Oudeweg

Bulletin #66: Israel's spies whitewashing the Biden Administration

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Revealed: The Israeli Spies Writing America's News

Alan Macleod
19–24 minutes

One year after Oct. 7 attacks, Netanyahu is on a winning streak.” So reads the title of a recent [Axios article](#) describing the Israeli prime minister riding on an unbeatable wave of triumphs. These stunning military “successes,” its author **Barak Ravid** notes, include the bombing of Yemen, the assassinations of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and the [pager attack](#) against Lebanon.

The same author recently went viral for an article that claimed that Israeli attacks against Hezbollah are “not intended to lead to war but are an attempt to reach ‘de-escalation through escalation.’” Users on social media mocked Ravid for this bizarre, Orwellian reasoning. But what almost everybody missed is that Barak Ravid is an Israeli spy – or at least he was until recently. Ravid is a former [analyst](#) with Israeli spying agency Unit 8200, and as recently as [last year](#), was still a reservist with the Israeli Defense Forces group.

Unit 8200 is Israel’s largest and perhaps most controversial spying organization. It has been responsible for many high-profile espionage and terror operations, including the recent pager attack that injured thousands of Lebanese civilians. As this investigation will reveal, Ravid is far from the only Israeli ex-spook working at top U.S. media outlets, working hard to manufacture Western support for his country’s actions.

White House Insider

Ravid has quickly become one of the most influential individuals in the Capitol Hill press corps. In April, he won the prestigious White House Press Correspondents’ Award “for overall excellence in White House coverage”—one of the highest awards in American journalism. Judges were

impressed by what they [described](#) as his “deep, almost intimate levels of sourcing in the U.S. and abroad” and picked out six articles as exemplary pieces of journalism.

Most of these stories consisted of simply printing anonymous White House or Israeli government sources, making them look good, and distancing President Biden from the horrors of the Israeli attack on Palestine. As such, there was functionally no difference between these and White House press releases. For example, one story the judges picked out was titled “Scoop: Biden tells Bibi 3-day fighting pause could help secure release of some hostages,” and presented the 46th President of the United States as a dedicated humanitarian hellbent on reducing suffering. Another described how “frustrated” Biden was becoming with Netanyahu and the Israeli government.

Protestors had [called](#) on reporters to snub the event in solidarity with their fallen counterparts in Gaza (which, at the time of writing, comes to at least [128 journalists](#)). Not only was there no boycott of the event, but organizers gave their highest award to an Israeli intelligence official-turned-reporter who has earned a reputation as perhaps the most dutiful stenographer of power in Washington.

Ravid was personally presented with the award by President Biden, who embraced him like a brother. That a known (former) Israeli spy could hug Biden in such a manner speaks volumes about not only the intimate relationship between the United States and Israel but about the extent to which establishment media holds power to account.

It was a moving and special night that I never imagined even in my wildest dreams. It wouldn't have been possible without my editors at [@axios](#) who made my stories better, my sources who trusted me, my family that came with me to Washington, and you, the readers. Thank you pic.twitter.com/aMQd2prsam

— Barak Ravid (@BarakRavid) [April 28, 2024](#)

Ravid has made a name for himself by uncritically printing flattering information given to him by either the U.S. or Israeli government and passing it off as a scoop. In April, he [wrote](#) that “President Biden laid out an ultimatum to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in their call on Thursday: If Israel doesn’t change course in Gaza, ‘we won’t be able to support you,’” and that he [was](#) “making his strongest push for an end to the fighting in Gaza in six months of war, and warning for the first time that U.S. policy on the war will depend on Israel’s adherence to his demands,” which included “an immediate ceasefire.” In July, he [repeated](#) anonymous sources that told him that Netanyahu and Israel are striving for “a diplomatic solution” – another highly dubious claim.

Other articles by Ravid following the same pattern include:

- [Scoop: Biden tells Bibi he’s not in it for a year of war in Gaza](#)
- [Scoop: White House cancels meeting, scolds Netanyahu in protest over video](#)
- [Biden “running out” of patience with Bibi as Gaza war hits 100 days](#)
- [Biden-Bibi clash escalates as U.S. accused of undermining Israeli government](#)
- [Biden and Bibi “red lines” for Rafah put them on a collision course](#)
- [Biden on hot mic: Told Bibi we needed “come to Jesus” meeting on Gaza](#)
- [Scoop: White House loses trust in Israeli government as Middle East spirals](#)
- [Israeli minister lambasted at White House about Gaza and war strategy](#)
- [Scoop: Biden told Bibi U.S. won’t support an Israeli counterattack on Iran](#)

This relentless whitewashing of the Biden administration has drawn widespread mockery online.

“AXIOS EXCLUSIVE: After selling Netanyahu millions of dollars worth of weapons, Biden played —loudly — Taylor Swift’s ‘Bad Blood.’ ‘Everyone could hear it,’ a source close to Biden says,” [tweeted](#) X user David Grossman. “Continuing to hand over big piles of cash and weapons, but shaking my head so everyone knows i sort of disagree with it,” [quipped](#) comedian Hussein Kesvani, in response to Ravid’s latest article suggesting that Biden has become “increasingly distrustful” of the Israeli government.


Throughout this supposed split between the U.S. and Israel, the Biden administration has continued to voice enthusiastic support for Israeli offensives, [block](#) ceasefire resolutions and Palestinian statehood at the U.N., and has [sent](#) \$18 billion worth of weapons to Israel in the past 12 months. Thus, no matter how questionable these Axios reports are, they serve a vital role for Washington, allowing the Biden administration to distance itself from what international bodies have labeled a genocide. Ravid’s function has been to manufacture consent for the government among elite liberal audiences who read Axios, allowing them to continue to believe that the U.S. is an honest broker for peace in West Asia rather than a key enabler of Israel.

Ravid does not hide his open disdain for Palestinians. In September, he [retweeted](#) a post that stated:

That’s the PaliNazi way...they pocket concessions without giving anything in return and then use those concessions as the baseline for the next round of negotiations. PaliNazis don’t know how to tell the truth.”

Less than one week later, he [promoted](#) Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant’s highly dubious claim that Israeli Defense Forces had found a picture of the children al-Qassam Brigades leader Mohammed Sinwar celebrating in front of a huge picture of planes hitting the World Trade Center. Gallant stated that they had found this picture – clearly trying to falsely associate Palestinians with 9/11 – in a tunnel “where the Sinwar brothers were hiding like rats.”

this is amazing. Barak Ravid, who is considered by the Western media class to be the greatest most objective neutral "journalist" on the ongoing Gaza genocide even though he served in Israeli military intelligence and constantly launders Israeli propaganda, is now openly... pic.twitter.com/IYldfmVqaC

—  (@zei_squirrel) [September 6, 2024](#)

An Infamous Spy Agency

Founded in 1952, Unit 8200 is the Israeli military’s largest and most controversial division.

Responsible for covert operations, spying, surveillance and cyberwarfare, since October 7, 2023, the group has been at the forefront of the world’s attention. It is [widely identified](#) as the organization behind the infamous pager attack on Lebanon, which left at least nine dead and around 3,000 people injured. While many in Israel (and Ravid himself) hailed the operation as a success, it was condemned worldwide as an egregious act of terrorism, [including](#) by ex-CIA director Leon Panetta.

Unit 8200 has also [constructed](#) an artificial intelligence-powered kill list for Gaza, suggesting tens of thousands of individuals (including women and children) for assassination. This software was the primary targeting mechanism the IDF used in the early months of its attack on the densely populated strip.

Described as Israel's Harvard, Unit 8200 is one of the most prestigious institutions in the country. The selection process is highly competitive; parents spend fortunes on science and math classes for their children, hoping they will be picked for service there, unlocking a lucrative career in Israel's burgeoning hi-tech sector.

It also serves as the centerpiece of Israel's futuristic repressive state apparatus. Using gigantic amounts of data compiled on Palestinians by tracking their every move through face recognition cameras monitoring their calls, messages, emails and personal data, Unit 8200 has created a dystopian dragnet that it uses to surveil, harass and suppress Palestinians.

Unit 8200 compiles dossiers on every Palestinian, including their medical history, sex lives and search histories, so that this information can be used for extortion or blackmail later. If, for example, an individual is cheating on their spouse, desperately needs a medical operation, or is secretly homosexual, this can be used as leverage to turn civilians into informants and spies for Israel. One former Unit 8200 operative [said](#) that as part of his training, he was assigned to memorize different Arabic words for "gay" so that he could listen out for them in conversations.

Unit 8200 operatives have gone on to create some of the world's most downloaded apps and many of the most infamous spying programs, including Pegasus. Pegasus was used to surveil dozens of political leaders around the world, including France's Emmanuel Macron, South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, and Pakistan's Imran Khan.

The Israeli government authorized the sale of Pegasus to the Central Intelligence Agency, as well as some of the most authoritarian governments on the planet. This included Saudi Arabia, who used the software to surveil Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi before he was assassinated by Saudi agents in Türkiye.

A recent MintPress News [investigation](#) found that a large proportion of the worldwide VPN market is owned and operated by an Israeli company headed and co-founded by a Unit 8200 alumnus.

In 2014, 43 Unit 8200 reservists [penned](#) a joint statement declaring that they were no longer willing to serve in the unit on account of its unethical practices, which included making no distinction between ordinary Palestinian citizens and terrorists. The letter also noted that their intelligence was passed on to powerful local politicians, who used it as they saw fit.

This public statement left Ravid bristling with anger at his co-workers. In the wake of the scandal, Ravid went on Israeli Army radio to [attack](#) the whistleblowers. Ravid said that to oppose the occupation of Palestine was to oppose Israel itself, as the occupation is a fundamental "part" of Israel. "If the problem is really the occupation," he said, "then your taxes are also a problem — they fund the soldier at the checkpoint, the education system... and 8200 is a great spin."

Leaving aside Ravid's comments, the question arises: is it really acceptable that members from a group designed to infiltrate, surveil and target foreign populations, that has produced many of the planet's most dangerous and invasive spying technology, and is widely to be behind sophisticated international terror attacks, are writing Americans' news about Israel and Palestine? What would the

reaction be if senior figures in U.S. media were outed as intelligence officers for Hezbollah, Hamas, or Russia's F.S.B.?

News About Israel, Brought to You by Israel

Ravid is far from the only influential journalist in America with deep ties to the Israeli state, however. [Shachar Peled](#) spent three years as an officer in Unit 8200, leading a team of analysts in surveillance, intelligence and cyberwarfare. She also [served](#) as a technology analyst for the Israeli intelligence service, Shin Bet. In 2017, she was hired as a producer and writer by CNN and spent three years putting together segments for Fareed Zakaria and Christiane Amanpour's shows. Google later hired her to become their Senior Media Specialist.



Another Unit 8200 agent who went on to work for CNN is [Tal Heinrich](#). Heinrich spent three years as a Unit 8200 agent. Between 2014 and 2017, she was the field and news desk producer for CNN's notoriously pro-Israel Jerusalem Bureau, where she was one of the principal journalists shaping America's understanding of Operation Protective Edge, Israel's bombardment of Gaza that killed more than 2,000 people and left hundreds of thousands displaced. Heinrich later left CNN and is now the official spokesperson of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

CNN's penchant for hiring Israeli state figures continues to this day. Tamar Michaelis, for example, currently works for the network, producing much of its Israel/Palestine content. This is despite having previously [served](#) as an official IDF spokesperson in the Israeli Defense Forces.

The New York Times, meanwhile, hired Anat Schwartz, an ex-Israeli Air Force Intelligence officer with zero journalistic experience. Schwartz co-wrote the infamous and now [discredited](#) "Screams Without Words" [expose](#), which claimed that Hamas fighters systematically sexually violated Israelis on October 7. Times staff themselves revolted over the lack of evidence and fact-checking in the piece.

Multiple New York Times employees, including star columnist David Brooks, have had children [serving](#) in the IDF; even as they report or offer opinions on the region, the Times never disclosed these glaring conflicts of interest to its readers. Nor has it disclosed that it purchased a Jerusalem house for its bureau chief that was stolen from the family of Palestinian intellectual Ghada Karmi in 1948.

MintPress News [interviewed](#) Karmi last year about her latest book and Israeli attempts to silence her. Former New York Times Magazine writer and current editor-in-chief of The Atlantic Jeffrey Goldberg (an American) dropped out of the University of Pennsylvania to volunteer as an IDF prison guard during the first Palestinian Intifada (uprising). In his memoirs, Goldberg [revealed](#) that, while serving in the IDF., he helped cover up the abuse of Palestinian prisoners.

Social media companies, too, are filled with former Unit 8200 agents. A 2022 MintPress [study](#) found no fewer than 99 former Unit 8200 operatives working for Google.

Facebook also employs dozens of ex-spooks from the controversial unit. This includes Emi Palmor, who sits on Meta's oversight board. This 21-person panel ultimately decides the direction of Facebook, Instagram and Meta's other offerings, adjudicating on what content to allow, promote, and what to suppress. Meta has been formally [condemned](#) for its systematic suppression of Palestinian voices across its platforms by Human Rights Watch, which documented over 1,000 instances of overt anti-Palestinian censorship in October and November 2023 alone. A measure of this bias is highlighted by the fact that, at one point, Instagram automatically [inserted](#) the word "terrorist" into the profiles of users who called themselves Palestinian.

Despite the widespread claims by U.S. politicians that it is a hotbed of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic racism, TikTok also employs many former Unit 8200 agents in key positions in its organization. For example, in 2021, it hired [Asaf Hochman](#) as its global head of product strategy and operations. Before joining TikTok, Hochman spent over five years as an Israeli spook. He now works for Meta.

Top Down Pro-Israel Censorship

When it comes to the Israeli attack on its neighbors, corporate media has consistently displayed a pro-Israel bias. The New York Times, for example, regularly [refrains](#) from identifying the perpetrator of violence when that perpetrator is the Israeli military and [described](#) the 1948 genocide of around 750,000 Palestinians as a mere "migration." A [study](#) of the paper's coverage found that words like "slaughter," "massacre," and "horrific" appear 22 times more frequently when discussing Israeli deaths than Palestinian ones, despite the gigantic disparity in the number of people killed on both sides.

Meanwhile, in a story about how Israeli soldiers shot 335 bullets at a car containing a Palestinian child and then shot the rescue workers who came to save her, CNN [printed](#) the headline "Five-year-old Palestinian girl found dead after being trapped in car with dead relatives" – a title that could be interpreted that her death was a tragic accident.

This sort of reporting does not happen by accident. In fact, it comes straight from the top. A leaked New York Times [memo](#) from November revealed that company management explicitly instructed its reporters not to use words such as "genocide," "slaughter," and "ethnic cleansing" when discussing Israel's actions. Times' staff must refrain from using words like "refugee camp," "occupied territory," or even "Palestine" in their reporting, making it almost impossible to convey some of the most basic facts to their audience.

CNN staff are under similar pressure. Last October, new C.E.O. Mark Thompson [sent](#) out a memo to all staff instructing them to make sure that Hamas (and not Israel) is presented as responsible for the violence, that they must always use the moniker "Hamas-controlled" when discussing the Gaza Health Ministry and their civilian death figures, and barring them from any reporting of Hamas'

viewpoint, which its senior director of news standards and practices told staff was “not newsworthy” and amounted to “inflammatory rhetoric and propaganda.”

Both the Times and CNN have fired multiple journalists over their opposition to Israeli actions or support for Palestinian liberation. In November, the Times’ Jazmine Hughes was forced out after she [signed](#) an open letter opposing genocide in Palestine. The newspaper [terminated](#) Hosam Salem’s contract the previous year after a pressure campaign from pro-Israel group [Honest Reporting](#). And CNN anchor Marc Lamont Hill was abruptly [fired](#) in 2018 for calling for Palestinian liberation in a speech at the United Nations.

Large organizations like Axios, CNN and the New York Times obviously know who they are hiring. These are some of the most sought-after jobs in journalism, and hundreds of applicants are likely applying for each position. The fact that these organizations choose to select Israeli spies above everybody else raises serious questions about their journalistic credibility and their purpose.

Hiring agents from Unit 8200 to produce American news should be as unthinkable as employing Hamas or Hezbollah fighters as reporters. Yet former Israeli spooks are entrusted with informing the American public about their country’s ongoing offensives against Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, Iran and Syria. What does this say about the credibility and biases of our media?

Since Israel could not continue to prosecute this war without American aid, the battle for the American mind is as important as actions on the ground. And as the propaganda war wages, the lines between journalist and fighter blur. The fact that many of the top journalists supplying us with news about Israel/Palestine are literally former Israeli intelligence agents only underlines this.

Feature photo | Illustration by MintPress News

[Alan MacLeod](#) is Senior Staff Writer for MintPress News. After completing his PhD in 2017 he published two books: [Bad News From Venezuela: Twenty Years of Fake News and Misreporting](#) and [Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent](#), as well as [a number of academic articles](#). He has also contributed to [FAIR.org](#), [The Guardian](#), [Salon](#), [The Grayzone](#), [Jacobin Magazine](#), and [Common Dreams](#).



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